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State Environmental Quality Board releases study on SW Minnesota Xcel Energy transmission line project; Pre-hearing meetings, formal hearings set for February, March

For Immediate Release
Jan. 21, 2005

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Environmental Quality Board
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(ST. PAUL) – The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) has prepared a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) on Xcel Energy's plan for building two new high-voltage transmission lines in Southwest Minnesota.

The purpose of the EIS is to evaluate the advantages and impacts of the various routes and substation sites under consideration. Final decisions have not been made. The next steps include a 30-day formal comment period on the draft EIS, which ends on Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2005. During this period, the EQB staff in February will hold three public pre-hearing open house information meetings. The formal administrative hearings leading to a final decision are scheduled for the first week of March 2005. After the hearings, the administrative law judge will issue a recommendation to the EQB for their final decision at a subsequent EQB meeting.

Pre-hearing information meetings

The EQB staff will hold three pre-hearing information meetings that begin at 4 p.m. at the following locations:

- Luverne Rock County Library, 201 West Main Street, Feb. 2, 2005
- Lakefield Senior Citizen Center, 112 South Main Street, Feb. 8, 2005
- Reading Community Center, 26991 200th St, Reading, Feb. 9, 2005

Each pre-hearing information meeting is scheduled for 4-8:30 p.m. using an open-house format at which citizens can review the proposed project and maps, review and comment on the draft EIS and learn more about the upcoming hearing. Each meeting will also include a brief EQB staff presentation at 7 p.m., followed by an open public comment opportunity.

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The public hearings

The EIS comment period focuses on assuring that the EIS information is accurate and complete. The purpose of the formal hearings is to determine which route and substation sites are best.

In an effort to encourage citizen participation in the process, multiple sessions of the hearing are scheduled for the following four dates and locations in southwest Minnesota:

- Lakefield Senior Citizen Center, 112 South Main Street, March 1, 2005
- Wilmont Community Center, 316 4th Avenue, March 2, 2005
- Luverne Rock County Library, 201 West Main Street, March 3, 2005
- Chandler City Center, 241 4th Street, March 4, 2005

Two sessions will be held at each location: An afternoon session beginning at 2 p.m. and an evening session starting at 7 p.m.

The formal hearing notice contains additional details and is available online at:

<http://www.eqb.state.mn.us/pdf/FileRegister/xcel345/Hearing%20Notice.pdf>.

The project

The proposed transmission lines are part of a four-line project approved by the Public Utilities Commission in 2004 to help deliver wind energy from Buffalo Ridge. Xcel Energy has applied to the EQB for one route-permit covering two new power lines.

The larger of the two is an approximately 86-mile, 345-kilovolt line running east-west from the Split Rock Substation near Sioux Falls, S.D., to the Lakefield Junction Substation in Jackson County, Minn. The second is a 115-kilovolt line that will run northwest from a new Nobles County substation for about 40 miles to the existing Chanarambie substation in Murray County. The project also requires a new substation in Nobles County to connect the new 115-kilovolt line into the new 345-kilovolt line.

The draft EIS

The 90-page draft EIS and information related to this project are available on the EQB web site at: <http://www.eqb.state.mn.us/Docket.html?Id=6466>. The EIS also includes a six-page summary and conclusion section. Copies of the draft EIS are available at the following locations: Rock County Community Library, Luverne; Adrian Library; Nobles County Library, Worthington; Jackson County Library, Lakefield; Fulda Memorial Library; Slayton Public Library; and Chandler City Hall. A copy can also be requested by calling the EQB at 651-296-2571.

Draft EIS comment due date: Formal comments on the accuracy and completeness of the draft EIS will be accepted until **Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2005**.

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Comments on the draft EIS should be sent by e-mail or U.S. mail to:

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EQB Public Advisor: Questions about this project, the pre-hearing information meetings or how to participate in the hearing can be directed to the EQB public advisor, George Johnson, (651-296-2888); george.johnson@state.mn.us. The public advisor is available to answer questions about the hearing procedure and how to effectively participate, but does not provide legal advice.

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